



**Minutes of D-E NCA Advisory Council meeting, July 6, 2011  
Delta Performing Arts Center, 822 Grand Ave., Delta**

Advisory Council members attending:

- Chair Katie Steele of Grand Junction
- Joe Neuhof of Grand Junction
- Oscar Massey of Whitewater
- Terry Kimber of Delta
- Neil "Mike" Wilson of Eckert
- Steve Acquafresca of Grand Junction
- Vice-chair Bill Harris of Montrose
- Tamera Minnick of Grand Junction

Absent members:

- Jason Beason of Paonia

BLM staff attending: Katie A. Stevens, Ben Blom, Andy Windsor, Brodie Farquhar and Barbara Sparrow

- Audience members: Lee Gelatt, Janice Shepherd, Steve Chapel, Pat Gilliam, James Solomon, Gene Gilliam, Ken Johnson, Ken Sanders, Tom Derryberry, Keith Fife, Jan Potterveld, Kaye Simonson, Joyce Olson, Steve Smith, Conrad Tucker, Mary Tucker, Eric Rechel, Roger and Nannette Sloan. Doug Atchley of Delta attended to provide a Delta County perspective.

Chairwoman Katie Steele called the meeting to order at 3 p.m. She noted the presence of a quorum.

**Public comment (Round 1)**

**James Solomon** of Palisade and on behalf of the Motorcycle Trail Riding Association of Grand Junction, urged the Advisory Council and the Bureau of Land Management to regard the Zone 3 region (Cactus Park) as a Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) and manage it for motorized and multiple use recreation. He urged the special interest recreation groups to "come together" and share the use of the land. Solomon said the Old Highway (Tabeguache Trail) provides opportunities for long-distance travel, while the old Whitewater dump would make an ideal location for trials competition (challenging rides where points are deducted when feet touch the ground).

**Lee Gelatt**, on behalf of Quiet Trails, asked the Council and BLM to consider one or two quiet-use trails in Cactus Park, noting that no road or trail in Zone 3 is designated "quite use." He said the group recognizes the predominance of motorized recreation in Cactus Park, and doesn't want to change that.

Gelatt did urge the Council and BLM to always protect resources, when they come into conflict with other uses.

**Eric Rechel**, of the Sierra Club, urged the BLM to consider the old North Dominguez wilderness plan within the range of alternatives.

**Jan Potterveld**, an equestrian advocate, said horse riders would like access to Triangle Mesa in the Dominguez Canyon Wilderness. A horse trailer parking lot near the wilderness border would help.

**Steve Smith**, representing the Wilderness Society and 26 conservation groups that advocated wilderness protections in DENCA, said Cactus Park is a microcosm of the DENCA, with extensive opportunities for motorized recreation, hiking, mountain biking, quiet and wilderness recreation. He noted that BLM is required during a planning process, to maintain an inventory of lands with wilderness characteristics, then decide whether to protect those characteristics, within alternative development and impact analysis. Citizen proposals, like that for Dominguez North, should be considered, he said.

**Jan Shepherd** of the Great Old Broads for Wilderness, said Cactus Park is rich in cultural sites, noting her own discoveries of stone flakes, tools and even an old steamer trunk. She urged BLM to do cultural surveys on all existing trails. She also urged the creation of small parking spots along Highway 141, to allow hikers with low clearance vehicles to easily get to Cactus Park.

**Tom Derryberry** of Western Slope ATV Association, said motorized recreation has been pushed into Cactus Park from other areas, and that there's plenty of room for quiet use. His group makes systematic clean-up rides twice a year. He urged BLM to leave existing trails alone, and if a user-created trail is judged non-sustainable, create an alternative before closing the bad trail. He said trails are there for a reason, and warned that if they are closed, ATV riders will go somewhere else.

Council member **Mike Wilson**, a member of the Colorado Off-Highway Vehicle Coalition, said the group recently honored **Katie Stevens** as "BLM Manager of the Year" with a plaque.

### **Pre-meeting Reminders**

**Ben Blom**, the planning team lead, recapped the previous meeting (June 15th) where the Council talked about the Wild and Scenic River Act and the two public comment letters submitted to date – one from a stake-holders's group and one from 10 conservation organizations. The Council focused on the fact that the conservation organizations provided suitability and designation comments for five W&SR segments inside D-ENCA.

The conservation groups judged three streams as suitable, *with* full protection and recommendation to Congress, including:

- Rose Creek
- Cottonwood Creek
- Dry Fork Escalante Creek\*

The suitable streams, *without* recommendation to Congress were:

- Gunnison River, segment 3
- Escalante Creek, segment 1

*\*(BLM does not regard the Dry Fork of Escalante Creek as "eligible" for the W&SR.)*

By a 4-2 vote, the Council recommended that no D-ENCA river/stream segment should be considered suitable for protection under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

### **Zone 3/Cactus Park PowerPoint Presentation**

The place names of note in the area are Ninemile Hill, Cactus Park, Farmer's Canyon, Gunnison Bluffs, Gibbler Mountain. Zone 3 is bordered by East Creek and the Unaweep Canyon to the northwest, the Gunnison River to the northeast, the Dominguez Canyon Wilderness to the southeast and the Uncompahgre National Forest to the southwest.

Elevation ranges from 4,625-feet in the Gunnison Bluffs 8,100-feet near the Uncompahgre National Forest. Gibbler Mountain is 7,628 feet in elevation.

**Key data:** BLM land is 39,792 acres. One private in-holding is 160.5 acres.

**Dino digs:** Zone 3 is considered to be fairly rich in fossils. The skull of an Ankylosaurid --an armored type of dinosaur -- was found here last spring and received widespread news coverage.

**Vegetation:** Land health assessment is that Zone 3 is in good condition – the exception being the Cactus Park Road area, which is meeting health standards, with problems.

Problems are loss of native plants/ predominance of exotic plants; encroachment of pinyon-juniper into sagebrush parks; low plant biodiversity; accelerated soil erosion and habitat fragmentation.

Causes include livestock grazing (past and/or present); drought; vegetation treatments; altered fire regimes and road and trail proliferation.

**Grazing:** Gibbler Common allotment includes 6 pastures

- 3 are used during the spring
- 3 are used during the fall/winter

**Special status species:** BLM sensitive plants located in this zone include the Colorado hookless cactus (federally endangered) and the Grand Junction and Naturita milkvetch (BLM sensitive)

BLM Sensitive Species in Zone 3 (c = confirmed, p = potential habitat)

- Gunnison sage grouse (c)
- Desert bighorn sheep (c)
- Northern goshawk (P)
- Bats (Allen's big-eared bat, Big free-tailed bat, Spotted bat, Townsend's big-eared bat, Fringed myotis) (P)
- Midget-faded rattlesnake (P)
- Milk snake (P)
- Columbian sharp-tailed grouse (P)
- Brewer's sparrow (P)

**Cultural sites:** Cultural surveys across Highway 141 in Bangs Canyon and in Farmer's Canyon in Zone 3 have found a very high density of cultural sites. This is likely the case throughout Zone 3

The Cactus Park zone contains hunting camps, culturally modified trees, deeply buried significant sites and rock art.

**Discussion: Massey,** the grazing permit holder on Gibbler Common allotment, said his and BLM's management has made things better. He praised the trail improvement and clean-up work of ATV clubs, but noted the damage that can be done by irresponsible riders – much worse than by livestock.

**Derryberry** said vegetation chaining and reseeding has improved vegetation.

## Break

**Recreation:** 50,000 visitors use this zone annually, approximately half of all recreation use in the NCA. A survey by Colorado Mesa University faculty helped define what recreationists value in Zone 3 – social cohesion and the ability to work where people play – right close to home.

**OHV:** Scoping and recreation focus groups suggest that many members of the public would like to see the Cactus Park/Ninemile Hill area become an OHV emphasis area.

Cactus Park has a high density of OHV trails. Many trails were user-created, and many have sustainability issues.

**Hike/Ride:** Equestrians and hikers enjoy the Cactus Park trails and trailheads that gives them access to the Dominguez Wilderness.

**Mountain Bike:** The mountain biking community would like a new single-track trail system in Cactus Park, Gunnison Bluffs and Gibbler Mountain areas. The emphasis would be on making the trails mechanized/pedestrian/equestrian, but some of these trails could be multiple-use motorized/mechanized/foot trails. The mountain biking community would like to see an SRMA-type management approach for mountain biking in this zone

**Camping:** The majority of camping the Zone 3 is in dispersed, undesignated camp sites. There are probably hundreds of dispersed campsites throughout Zone 3. Dominguez Campground is a popular site, featuring a rest-room, campsites, picnic tables and a trailhead for hikers and equestrians who want to venture down the Big Dominguez Canyon.

**Rock climbing:** bouldering and multi-pitch climbing is popular in Unaweep Canyon.

**Hunting:** The higher elevations of Zone 3 are popular with big game hunters, particularly elk and deer hunters. Almost the entire NCA falls into Game Management Unit 62.

**Auto Touring:** Highway 141 bounds the northwest side of the NCA. It is the first leg of a scenic byway that sweeps south and then southeast, through Gateway, Naturita, Norwood and Placerville.

**Travel Management:** There is a large range in the route density in Zone 3. Highest density is the Front Country, near the main Cactus Park road and the old flagstone quarries. Lowest density areas are Gunnison Bluffs, Gibbler Mountain and Gibbler Gulch. Roads were built or established for livestock grazing, mining, fossil exploration, flagstone quarrying, fuel wood harvesting and by motorized recreationists.

### **Wilderness Characteristics Outside of Designated Wilderness**

#### Policy Context:

- The BLM is required to update its inventory of lands with wilderness characteristics in its RMPs
- This applies to lands that are outside of wilderness study areas and federally designated wilderness
- If the BLM finds lands with wilderness characteristics, the BLM is not mandated to protect those wilderness characteristics
- BLM staff is still in the process of updating the inventory in the D-E NCA

#### Description:

- There is one area within Zone 3 that has been identified by the public in a citizen's wilderness proposal and in public scoping comments
  - Gunnison Bluffs/Dominguez North

#### **Public Comment:**

**Steve Chapel,** WS ATV Assoc: Cactus Park needs to be managed for its number one use – motorized recreation.

**Shepherd:** Digging up plants should not be permitted in an NCA. Stevens responded that D-E NCA will entertain requests from Native Americans regarding plant acquisition, but not from others –until the plan is finished and determines future management. Shepherd's comments pertain to this future management.

**Rechel:** BLM should put a lot of thought into how it manages the desert bighorn population.

**Derryberry:** Big horn have disappeared wherever people appear. He said the herds are now deep in the wilderness because they've been pushed out elsewhere.

**Gelatt:** A quiet trail needs to be designated in Cactus Park. He urged BLM to acknowledge the wilderness characteristics found in Dominguez North.

**Harris:** Mountain bikes will stay on single-track trail, especially in cactus country.

**Neuhoff:** Asked how a SRMA area managed for motorized use could allow for quiet use?

**Stevens** and **Windsor** responded that it would depend on how objectives and outcomes were written for that area.

#### **Next meeting**

The next meeting for the Advisory Council is July 20 at the Mesa County Courthouse Annex, Training Room A, 544 Rood, Grand Junction. The Council will focus specifically on a more detailed discussion of recreation in Zone 3.